

We Planted a Seed in a Dream That Came True

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As a first-generation college student, it has been a tumultuous journey. I had no knowledge regarding higher level academia and did not think I would venture this far. My older sister and I are attending Cal State University, Los Angeles. According to our degree planners predicted to graduate in Spring 2022. I face the pressure to succeed and be an influential role model for my family. My mother is my biggest source of support in all aspects of my life. Although she lacks knowledge relating to college. Her experiences were turned into valuable life lessons. Those teachings greatly influenced my perspective at a young age. Making my mother proud is only part of my academic endeavor. Becoming a role model for my younger brothers. They are in a point of their lives where their minds are impressionable. Their personalities have been shaped by their values, public education, and environment. Educated by exposure to different ethnicities, races, religions, cultures, and other discourses.

My family roots are traced back to *Oaxaca, Mexico* where patriarchy was and remains prevalent. It's reinforced by the notion of *machismo* found in my Mexican culture. Female independence ran low, and illiteracy ran high. Both genders relied on common sense and survival skills. My ancestors were born and raised in small *pueblos*. Hidden in the mountain areas of Oaxaca, where government assistance and recognition were nonexistent. They lived in small *jacalitos* surrounded by forestry, mountains, and wildlife. Those jacalitos were constructed out of dirt, clay, and other earth minerals. The same greenery that gave them shelter, encapsulated them in an endless cycle of machismo and violence.

There is one woman that stands out among the masses; she was my great-grandmother from my mother's side. At such a young age she found herself trapped in an arranged marriage. Her family's ideologies were constructed around a male dominated society. Naturally, her voice held no command in the decisions pertaining to her future. She did what most females did became a sheep to herd, not that I blame women who did. Truthfully, not every developed and developing nation agrees with women's rights. Many major cities around the world were experiencing a shift in traditional gender roles. Yet, indigenous societies remained the same. I cannot imagine how scared, lonely, and unprotected women felt during this era.

Furthermore, my great-grandmother had to adapt to her new life. Consisting of marriage, childbearing, and domestic violence. Her husband my great-grandfather upheld his belief of machismo. An umbrella term, *machista* is used to describe men who are aggressive, controlling, and oppressive. This biased mentality that as the “man” he is the sole provider and head of his household. His wife was not his equal but rather his inferior partner. His toxic masculinity demanded her complete subservience.

As time progressed, violence became unhinged, and she found herself in a state of life and death. Her fight-or-flight response was at its highest peak, but she chose to fight. Despite not knowing how to read, write and unable to speak Spanish. Knowing that her only hope resided in uncharted territories. She managed to push past her fear of the unknown and travelled to the nearest city. Upon her arrival she came across people who spoke the same dialect and aided her. After successfully filing a police report, she managed to legally divorce her husband. My great-grandmother’s courage, perseverance, and motivation are the reasons why she is held in high regard. On her own she created a safeguard for her children and herself. Unbeknownst to my great-grandmother, her actions created a paradigm shift in our family lineage. Her story would go on to influence her future bloodline. A catalyst that promotes the growth of mindsets, perspective, and maturity.

As I reminisce, there is this sense of gratitude for my ancestor’s past experiences. More specifically my great-grandmother’s story, was passed down to her great-grandchildren. As a reminder, that we can either choose to be part of the problem or solution. Despite not having access to education or resources she managed to end the cycle of violence and machismo. Her story has given me the opportunity to appreciate all that I have. Fast forward to the present, I am a first-generation college student who is still adapting to her new environment. Yet, I can see that unlike my great-grandmother, I have access to public education, state, and federal resources. Attending a four-year academic institution that has not only enriched my knowledge. It has given me the tools necessary to be successful.

Although life has dealt me a great hand, it did not come without its challenges. One challenge was the *imposter syndrome*, when you feel out of place and doubt your own capabilities. For instance, I tend to discourage myself from further exploring new opportunities. Strangely enough, I sabotage them by doubting my own skills. That is when the second struggle presents itself, the *pressure of success* comes through. As a student who aspires to be an English major. I find myself wondering if my work is good enough. The passion and

dedication are there; the expectations and criticism are also present. An expression that holds truth, is that failure can either destroy you or strengthen you.

Although at first it felt like a burden, I have slowly converted it into my driving force. My primary education was constructed by my microsystem and personal values. Additionally, my secondary education was gradually developed throughout my years in school and an institution of higher education. After examining the two types of education that I have attained. It made me realize that many of my contemporaries experience the same predicament. It takes us a while to find our footing in college grounds.

Being a first-generation college student is tough. It is a series of events that gradually forms our identity. Mistakes, sufferings, failures, hard work, perseverance, pressure, and sacrifice are part of success. It is not about how far we make it out of our communities. Or the distance we place between ourselves and our ancestors. It is about how far we can take our communities and families with us as we go forward. My great-grandmother proved that dreams can be planted, in places where growth is impossible. Whether you experience culture shock, imposter syndrome or the pressures of success. As first-generation students, we are living proof that success is an extensive process, that greatly changes you.